

Fictional story – Opinion piece

Karl sighed as he kicked another day's dirt from the soles of his boots. The days were getting longer. Well, in actuality, the days were pretty much as long as they had ever been, but one's conscience has a way of slowing things down.

Karl was a miner. His father was a miner. His father's father was a miner. Growing up in a town like Temiskaming Shores, it was pretty much a forgone conclusion that mining was your business. More than that, for a man like Karl, mining was a lifestyle. *If it's in the ground, it is mine(d)* – the town motto never made him blink twice. His friends – those drinking buddies he'd known since middle school – well, they were miners too. I mean, what do you expect to happen after the big wigs from corporate introduced Mining Matters into the Grade 3 curriculum? Yes, Karl's whole life and everybody that he loved and cared about seemed to take that long lift ride down into the depths, day in and day out. Despite occasional introspection whilst reading the cover of National Geographic (its fluorescent yellow cover always beckoned him) Karl never considered his mining life to be odd, never considered his fate to be anything but sealed. After all, it was just the way of things, right?

“Right”. Karl muttered to himself, “Damn right.” But even while saying it, Karl felt that all-familiar gnaw. As it goes with most folks, Karl wasn't getting any younger. That mind of his, once altogether occupied with thoughts of fishing weekends on the bay, and future plans of houses, cars, and all manner of things, was now starting to turn. Once energetic, nearly impatient with eagerness, he began to find himself sitting for long moments, looking out a half-frosted window, wondering about the things he'd be leaving behind.

Sometimes, mid-stare he would glimpse but for a moment that mining staple, that way of life, coming into sharper focus. If there was a legacy to be left, Karl wondered at the notion of leaving an earth less plentiful, less alive, than the one to which he had been born. He wondered at the everlasting impact of what had once seemed no more than an income. He kicked dirt from the soles of another pair of worn-out boots, turned on his head lamp and rode the lift down again into a dark, black ground. Naw, he thought – *if it's in the ground, it is mine(d)*. He looked up, as per tradition, at the last fleeting glimpse of daylight and a thought occurred to him – it was he who had been mined.